DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 120 UD 024 418

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TITLE How Liberated Are We: A Black Perception of the Feminist Movement.
PUB DATE 18 Mar 82
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council for Black Studies (6th, Chicago, IL, March 18, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Attitudes; *Black Colleges; *Black Students; *Colleges; *Feminism; Higher Education; *Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

This study examined how blacks view the feminist movement and whether the type of college attended altered their attitudes. Data were assessed from 161 black college students (male and female) who attended either a predominantly black or predominantly white college. The chi-square test was used to measure and examine significant differences between the two groups. Results show that while 36% of the sample did not identify with the feminist movement, 55% did find some feminist ideas to be similar to theirs. Individual differences in views about the feminist movement did exist, but these differences were not a reflection of college attended, nor, overall, of the sex of the respondent. It is concluded that further investigation into the feminist attitudes of college students should be conducted and that black college students should be educated about the issues involved in the feminist movement. (CG)

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HOW LIBERATED ARE WE: A BLACK PERCEPTION OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

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UD 024418

Paper presented at the National Council for
Black Studies 6th Annual Conference
Chicago, Illinois
March 18, 1982

ABSTRACT

The Feminist Movement has struggled to obtain the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to improve women's status. At the beginning of a new decade (1980), women were still asking the same question that prevailed throughout the '70s: "How Long Till Equality?"

Just as the blacks' struggles for social and economical equality have not receded, women's struggles for equality are still soaring. As the Women's Rights Movement became the subsequent of Civil Rights Movement, black women began to realize the double jeopardy: being black and female. Eventually, black women were confronted with pronouncing their true identity. Were black women expected to exemplify remissness with the Civil Rights Movement to participate with feminism?

This study examined how blacks view the feminist movement, and if the college attended made a difference. Data were assessed from 161 black college students who attended either a predominant black college or a predominant white university. The chi-square test was used to measure and examine significant differences between the two independent groups. The level of significance was set at .05.

Data results showed that while 36% of the sample did not identify with the feminist movement, 55% did find some of the feminist ideas similar to theirs. 40% felt black women should increase their participation in the movement. Parenthetically, it was viewed that the feminist movement does not undermine black leadership. There were proportionate differences in responses between the two groups. However, there was not a significant difference between feminist views and attitudes of black students attending a predominant white university. There was not a relationship between feminist views and attitudes and college attended.

Individual differences about the feminist movement did exist with black students; however, not between groups with respect to college attended. This is not to say that blacks do or do not tend to support the feminist movement. Nor can one conclude that black females do or do not generally identify with the feminist issues and concerns as the literature has inferred.

This study has important educational implications to assess and understand the needs and concerns of black students. The problem may seem complex; yet, a balance can be achieved through equal educational attainments.

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the last two decades, our society was not only confronted with the problems of race discrimination, but sex discrimination as well. The "equal opportunity" challenges that blacks presented during the 60's with the Civil Rights Movement were subsequently echoed by women during the 70's with the Women's Rights Movement.

As race and sex became the expedient pivotal core to transform social, political, and economical inequalities into equal opportunities for minority blacks and women, black women were expected to identify with both groups of people. Both movements sought to perpetuate change and to create an identity in a pluralistic society.

However, as the Feminist Movement gained more acute visibility during the 70's, black women were faced with a double jeopardy: being black and female. As a result, black women struggled with profound questions and difficulties. What was the black women to do as a black female? Could she identify with the acclaimed liberated rights? Was the movement supereminent and superficial for white women? Should women's rights replace blacks'? Such devastating questions vacilated not only black females, but black males as well.

There have been diversed sentiments about the black woman's position with the Feminist Movement, as well as about the extent of their participation in the movement. Is the women's movement predominately white, and are blacks for the movement?

The consensus tends to be that black women have not been able to identify with the women's liberation movement, because they do not have the same sentiments with the feminist issues. Black women cannot be expected to participate in the

Civil Rights and Feminist Movements as if they are the same. There is not a parallel struggle for total emancipation between the two. Painter (1973, p.37) observed why black women see themselves exempted from the feminist movement:

> While it is true that women's liberation followed closely the civil rights movement and took some of its tactics, black women generally resent the lib approach. Black women have always been in a somewhat wuperior position that many of them would be glad to relinquish. They recognize only too well that they must work with men, not against them in the larger black rights area.

The conquest of the liberated "housewife" to a prestigious working woman represents a fallacious image for the black woman. Feldman (1974) contends that women have seen the "housewife" role as an oppressed state which offers very little rewards. Freidan (1963) also asserts that household duties dull women's minds to the point they feel frustrated and trapped. Freidan further asserts that women have outgrown the household role; they want alternatives to motherhood. Feldman (1974, p.88) concurred that:

> Women's traditional role as mother has also been questioned by those in the women's rights movement. They argue that child care is but another example of woman's oppression. A mother is expected to sacrifice herself for her children, to place their interests over her own, just as a wife is expected to do the same for her husband. Consequently, the responsibilities of motherhood hinder woman from achieving her own potential as a human being. The results are destructive to a woman, man, and child.

Epstein (1974) believes that women have been made instruments of their own exclusion, because they have been made to feel uncomfortable when they leave home to go to work.

Conversely, Janeway (1971) believes that this view of the liberated housewife does not reflect nor represent the identity of black women. She contends that the black woman's world is different than that of the white woman. More black mothers work than white ones. As a result, the traditional woman's role has not been entirely applicable for black women.

Dr. Jeanne Noble (1978), in a profound retrospection of black women in America, reassesses the black woman's past as it reflects her present status and role in America. Noble contends that the black woman's crystalized present is not reflected in what women's liberation symbolizes because of her cryptic past. The black woman has not fully had the golden opportunities to enjoy the luxurious housewife life. Beal (1969, p.342) affirms that "most black women have to work to help house, feed, and clothe their families. Black women were never afforded any such phony luxuries." The black woman has had to struggle to find some type of employment as head of the household or as a necessary wage earner for the household family. There is often no choice about whether the black woman could stay home or work. Thus, she has had to spend hours away from her family. Noble (1978, p.124) views:

> Freidan's Feminine Mystique does not reflect nor represent the black woman's identity. The middle-class status for black women is not predicated on her husband's prestige and role in society. In black families, the black female represents part of the wage earner.

Noble also observed that in 1972, the black woman's earnings comprised 43 percent of the mean income of the black husband-wife earners, compared to 36 percent contributed by white wives. Therefore, Noble believes that black women are not joining the "white women's liberation venture" in large number. Her views state:

> Some women's liberation leaders were surprised during the early years of the women's movement that black women did not become blood sisters and eagerly embrace the goals of the women's movement (p.292).
>
> All too often the rhetoric of white women engaged in the "woman cause" appears to make the cause of blacks mild by comparison. This is probably why black men generally consider the movement distracting. Since most black people believe that there is no oppression like black oppression, too few women liberation leaders have bothered to make clear the difference (p.301).

This is not to say that black women do not seek liberation. Some of the goals of the women's rights movement are desired by black women. However, only in the sense that they serve as a vehicle to perpetuate more opportunities for black families. Black women share the same economical concerns that white women have about equal pay. The primary reason is that is necessitates income for the family. Yet, black women are not apt to yield quickly to accept the proposed goal. Beal (1970) points out that the middle-class women of the movement do not suffer from economic exploitation that most black women are subjected to daily. Noble (p.300) affirms that black women question white women's desire to share other social, political, and economical gains with them. She states:

> It is difficult for us to sympathize with those seeking more power for white women when the financial power in their midst has rarely and too superficially been used to right injustices and to deal with the liberation of the poor, the disenfranchised, and the racially different.

Black women tend to be interested in the education and employment status that the women's movement seek. However, the struggle for mobility differs from that of white women. Black women struggle to attain a college education and employment opportunities, because they want to avoid working in a white woman's kitchen.

The U.S. Department Bureau of Census reported that in 1979, out of 15,050 professional and technical jobs, such as accountants, engineers, lawyers, and physicians, women held 43.3 percent of these jobs. Blacks and other minorities held 8.9 percent of these occupations. Other data also showed that blacks and other minorities tended to be employed as service workers, such as private household. 23.2 percent of these jobs were held by blacks, compared to 12.0 percent of these same jobs held by whites. As Feldman (1974) points out, the employment and educational status of black women is different from white women

because of the level of education disparity. Feldman further contends that the unemployment rate and average income tends to also be greater. All in which she attributes to some extent to differences in educational levels.

There are other expressed sentiments about other feminist issues, such as birth control and abortions. Birth control and abortion attitudes have not only become legal and social controversial issues, but moral ones as well. These conflicting views are not only between black and white females, but among all women.

However, it seems that the different views are based on moral and/or religious reasons. There are those women who believe birth control and abortions are against religious beliefs and teachings. Other women assert that abortion is murder, and it violates human life principles. On the other hand, there are some women who believe that birth control and abortion decisions are personal decisions in which every woman has a right to make for herself.

The movement is opposed to any type of restricted legislative actions against abortions and birth control. Giele (1978, pp.23-24) states:

> The primary response of the women's movement to these events has been an effort to remove restrictions against contraception and abortion and provide instruction and self-help in gynecological procedures. Such women's groups as WEAL and NOW have counseled their members to mobilize opposition to any legislature that would restrict a woman's constitutional right to abortion as upheld by Supreme Court decision in 1973 . . . A central tenet of the women's movement is that women should be sufficiently knowledgeable and free to determine the best ways to control their bodies.

Beal (1979) views the black woman's position from a political view. Her premise is that black women want to be liberated from the manipulation of the political systems. She states the following views:

> We condemn this use of the black woman as a medical testing ground for the white middle class. Reports of the ill effects, including deaths, from the use of the birth-control pill only started to come to light when the white privileged class began to be affected . . .

Beal (p.349) adds:

> The rigid laws concerning abortions in this country are another means of subjugation and, indirectly, of outright murder. Rich white women somehow manage to obtain these operations with little or no difficulty . . .

Beal (p.349) believes:

> Black women have the right and responsibility to determine when it is in the interest of the struggle to have children or not to have them and this right must not be relinquished to anyone. It is also her right and responsiblity to determine when it is in her own best interests to have children, how many she will have, and how far apart. The lack of the availability of safe birth-control methods, the forced sterilization practices, and the inability to obtain legal abortions are all symptoms of a sick society that jeopardizes the health of black women (and thereby the entire black race) in its attempt to control the very life processes of human beings.

The Feminist Movement has struggled to obtain the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to improve women's status. ERA would protect women against discrimination, and give them equal protection for opportunities. In order for the articles to be added to the Constitution, Congress had to pass it, and be ratified by at least thirty-eight states. By 1973, Congress approved of ERA; however, three-fourths of the States did not.

Some women feel that ERA is necessary, while others oppose it. Those people who support it argue that the Fourteenth Amendment is inadequate. They further argue that ERA will improve the American social structure. On the other hand, those women who oppose ERA argue that it will threaten the social structure and the Fourteenth Amendment protects women from discrimination.

PURPOSE

The study was conducted as part of an overall study of the attitudes of black college students with regard to contemporary issues.

In this particular paper we will focus on the Women's Liberation Movement and how black students respond to it. We will also view the differences, if any, that sex and the college one is attending have on specific issues regarding the feminist movement and its effects on blacks in the country.

SUBJECTS

The subjects included 161 black college students. They were randomly selected from a small historically black college in the south (enrollment 400), and a large state university (enrollment 27,000, black enrollment 1300) in the same city. Ninety-six of the subjects, 52 males and 44 females were from the predominantly black institution, and the rest, 20 males and 45 females were from the predominantly white institution. There were 44 freshmen, 28 sophomores, 44 juniors, 32 seniors, 3 graduates and 6 who were classified in other categories. The majority of the subjects were from the south. With a significant number of predominantly black college sample coming from out of state.

PROCEDURE

An 8 page general background and attitudes questionnaire developed by the authors was administered. The questionnaire focused on five major subject areas: 1) demographic variables; 2) educational history; 3) feminism; 4) career goals and 5) sex, love and marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

59 percent of the respondents were from a predominate black college, and 41 percent were from a predominate white university. The percentage of female respondents was 55, and the percentage of male respondents was 45.

The demographic data revealed that a majority of the respondents were from the South (61 percent), followed by Southeast (16 percent), and North (11 percent). Most of the respondents were also reared in urban cities.

The largest percentage of the respondents grew up with both parents (57 percent), while 31 percent were reared by a mother only. The average number of children in the families was 4, where most of the respondents were the middle child. The average family annual income was from $5,000 to $10,000. Yet, 35 percent of the families had a $15,000 - $25,000 annual income.

The parents' level of education varied. However, the highest level of education for mothers and fathers was high school (30 and 27 percents). Only 8 percent of the mothers had a four-year college degree, but 19 percent had some college. 7 percent of the fathers had a four-year college degree, and 12 percent had some college. (See Table I).

The data results showed that 37 percent of the respondents did not identify with the feminist movement, while 32 percent of them did. On the other hand, 41 percent felt the movement is supportive of black women, but not support of black men. This percentage of respondents also felt black women should increase their participation in the movement.

The respondents did not feel that the feminist movement undermines black leadership (42 percent); neither did they feel that it was divisive to the black struggle (34 percent). Most of the respondents found the feminist ideas comparable to theirs (61 percent). They tended to support the Equal Rights Amendment (67 percent), and they tended to be sympathetic to it (44 percent). Yet, 39 percent were undecided about the movement being pro abortion. (see Table II).

Further data results revealed the respondents'attitudes about black males' support, black women's position in society, and black women's ability to cope. It was felt that black men are both supportive and non-supportive to black females (40 percent), and non-supportive to white females (42). The respondents tended to agree that black women are better able to cope with societal demands more than white women (84 percent), compared to this same attitude with black men (65 percent) and white men (58 percent). Yet, 41 percent of the respondents said black women are not better off than black men.

After analyzing responses to feminist issues and attitudes, these variables were examined for their relationship with respondents' sex when controlled by college attended. A congingency table was used to statistically analyze these variables. Chi-square statistics were used to measure and determine whether or not sex differences with feminist issues and attitudes responses persisted when controlled by college attended.

The data results showed there were consistent differences with how males and females responded to feminist issues and attitudes. These differences persisted with the college attended. Males consistently agreed and disagreed most of the same issues and attitudes; the same was true with females.

Although a large proportion of the males from both schools did not know if they identified with the feminist movement, the proportion who did respond felt they could not. Females from both schools were more able to identify. However, only the responses from the predominate black school yielded a significant different at the .001 level. When respondents were asked if the movement supported black men and women, there were not only sex differences, but college attended differences as well. Males from the predominate white school responded, "no," respectively, while females responded, "yes." Conversely, males from the predominate black school respectively responded, "yes," while females responded, "no." (See Table II.) There was only a significant difference at the .001 level with the responses from the predominate black school.

Whether or not black women should increase their participation in the feminist movement tended to vary according to sex and college attended. From the white school the male respondents agreed black women should not, whereas the female respondents felt they should. Reversed responses were given by male and female respondents attending the black school. There were no significant differences.

The feminist movement was not seen by males from both schools as one that undermines black leadership, nor divisive to the black struggle. Yet, the opposite views were expressed by females from both schools. Nevertheless, the responses did not result in a significant difference. A greater proportion of males did not seem to know if the feminist ideas were similar to theirs or not. Those males who did respond from both schools felt there were no similarities, compared to the females from both schools who felt there were. There was no significant difference at the .05 level with these responses and respondents' sex attending the predominate black college.

Females from both schools tended not to support the Equal Rights Amendment, whereas only the males from the predominate black school did support it. There was a significant difference at the .05 level with responses and respondents' sex from the predominate white school.

A greater proportion of the males from both schools did not know if the movement was pro abortion or not. Females from the predominate white school felt the movement was not, and a high proportion of females from the predominate white school felt that it was. (See Table II.)

On attitude responses, male and female responses persisted proportionately.

Males from both schools tended to agree that black males are supportive to black females; however, females from both schools saw black males as being non-supportive. Males from the predominate white school and females from the predominate black school felt that black males were supportive of white women, but females from the predominate white school felt they were not, and males from the predominate black school felt they were antagonistic. There was a significant difference at the .01 level from the black school.

The views that black women are better able to cope with societal demands than black men were consistent between schools, but not between males and females. Males tended to disagree, while females agreed. Responses from both

the males and females at both schools yielded significant differences at the .001 levels. When respondents were asked to compare this view of black women with white men, the responses differed according to sex and college attended. Only both male and female respondents from the predominate black college felt that black women were able to cope more than white women. Only females from the predominate black school gave a definitive answer to black women being better off than black men. They felt that black women were not better off.

CONCLUSIONS

The feminist movement appears to be a source of confusion among black college students. It has different meaning for men and women in sample. The information presented is by no means conclusive and may not reflect national attitudes and beliefs; however, the data reported does shed some light on the subject and indicates that further investigation into the feminist attitudes of college students should be conducted. There is also some indication that black college students should be educated about the issues involved in the feminist movement. Hopefully, they can then make appropriate decisions regarding their personal opinions on the subject.

Based on the data results the following conclusions were made:

There are no significant differences between most feminist issues and attitudes when college attended is controlled. Overall, respondents's sex could not be used to predict views on feminist issues. However, only three attitude responses could not be predicted from the respondents' sex values.

Other variables, such as parental level of education, and rearing and family income, should be tested with feminist responses and attitudes.

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TABLE I

DEMOGRAPHICS

Code		PBCR*	PWCR**	Totals
1	Male	52	20	72
2	Female	44	45	89
	Total (absolute frequency count)	96	65	161
FAMILY COMPOSITION (who they grew up with)				
1	Mother	33	29	31
2	Father	3	3	3
3&4	Other	10	8	9
5	Mother & Father	53	61	57
FAMILY SIZE (# children)				
1	1 (one)	2	6	4
2	2 (two)	7	17	12
3	3 (three)	17	15	16
4	4 (four)	20	14	17
5	5 (five)	10	22	16
6-14	6+(six or more)	43	27	35
Mother's Education/Father's Education				
1-3	Less than 8th grade	30/29	18/23	24/26
4	High school	29/31	31/21	30/27
5	Vocational school	8/10	2/4	5/7
6	Some college	19/9	19/15	19/12
7	College degree	8/6	10/8	9/7
8	Some graduate school	0/3	6/3	3/3
9	Master's or equivalent	3/1	9/7	6/4
10-12	Doctorate or equivalent (professional degree, post doctorate study)	2/1	4/5	3/3

*"Predominantly Black College" Respondents

**"Predominantly White College" Respondents

Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table II

Feminist Issues and Attitudes

CODE	Issues (F)/Attitudes (ATT)*	PBCR**				PWCR***				TOTAL	
		Male		Female		Male		Female			
		yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
F1	Do you identity with the feminist movement?	30	25	38	30	17	41	42	51	32	37
F2	Do you support the Equal Rights Amendment?	62	5	74	19	99	22	62	29	67	19
F3	Do you believe the Feminist movement is supportive of black men?	5	62	14	35	20	33	17	49	15	42
F4	Do you believe the Feminist movement is supportive of black women?	30	30	44	27	59	9	26	48	41	28
F5	Do you feel the movement is pro abortion?	38	14	37	26	27	23	48	22	38	22
F6	Do you feel the movement undermines black leadership?	20	55	16	40	22	47	33	33	22	42
F7	Do you feel the movement is divisive to the Black Struggle?	19	48	31	29	32	36	36	31	31	34
F8	Are you sympathetic to the ERA?	48	29	40	30	36	38	55	35	44	37
F9	Do you find some feminist ideas similar to your own?	62	10	76	10	37	39	64	19	61	20
F10	Do you feel black women should increase their involvement in the feminist movement?	38	38	45	17	40	20	35	35	40	25
ATT1	What do you feel is the reaction of black males to black females?	52	29	33	51	43	37	42	44	42	41
ATT2	What do you feel is the reaction of black males to white females?	29	38	33	47	17	45	25	33	26	42
	Do you believe that "black women are better able to cope with societal demands" than:										
ATT3	black men?	32	68	84	16	33	67	87	13	65	36
ATT4	white men?	42	58	55	46	72	28	61	40	58	43
ATT5	white women?	58	42	87	11	87	8	95	5	84	14
ATT6	Do you agree with the view that "black women are better off in this world than black men?"	19	38	21	23	26	42	16	66	21	41

* In the presentation of answers to the Attitude questions, "yes" can mean "agree" or "supportive and "no" can mean "disagree" or "non-supportive".

**"Predominantly Black College" Respondents
***"Predominantly White College" Respondents